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Navy & Marine Corps Medical News
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This service distributes news and information to Sailors and Marines, their families, civilian employees, and retired Navy and Marine Corps families. Further dissemination of this e-mail is encouraged.

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MN970298. Researchers Make Organ Transplant Breakthrough
Washington, DC - Navy medical researchers have reached a significant milestone in medicine's search to find a way to prevent mismatched transplanted organs from being rejected.

CAPT David Harlan, MC and LCDR Allan Kirk, MC tested a new medical therapy that seems to prevent the rejection of transplanted organs - even transplanted organs that are completely mismatched. While the precise mechanism preventing the organ rejection remains unclear, the researchers' data suggests the immune system is "re-educated" to leave the transplanted organ alone.

Currently, individuals in need of a transplant must wait for an organ from a suitably matched donor. After receiving the transplant, individuals must take anti-rejection medications for the rest of their lives to prevent the organ from being attacked by their own immune system and destroyed. Anti-rejection drugs often have significant unpleasant side effects and increase individual's susceptibility to infections and tumors. These drugs are also expensive.

As part of their research, the team transplanted very

mismatched kidneys into non-human primates and treated them with the novel therapy for 28 days after the operation. No other therapy, including the use of anti-rejection drugs, was administered. Six months later, the primates are robust and suffering no significant side effects. The short course of the therapy appears to be long-lasting, precluding the use of daily medication to prevent organ rejection.

The expected lifespan for primates with a mismatched kidney transplant that receive no treatment is less than ten days.

A summary of the team's research is in the Aug. 5 issue of the Proceedings of the National Academy of Science and on the Academy's Homepage at www.pnas.org.

Harlan and Kirk's research stems from earlier Navy work that suggests some immune responses could be turned "off" or "on" at will. Controlling this off or on response are T lymphocytes, or T cells, which play a key role in the immune system by fending off infectious agents. However, these T cells also recognize "invading" transplanted organs, and the immune response directed by the T cells ultimately leads to organ rejection.

This recent milestone was reached when the research team observed that T cells have two distinct "senses" to "sniff" out the intent of any invader, such as a transplanted organ. One sense very specifically recognizes invaders. This first sense can detect even subtle differences in tissues or organs.

However, simply recognizing an organ as an invader appears insufficient to alert T cells to call an all out attack. For T cells to become alerted, they must not only recognize the invader as foreign, but must also have other T cell sensors simultaneously triggered. These latter sensors are called "costimulatory receptors." The researchers' therapy allows the immune system to recognize the transplanted organ, but prevents costimulatory receptors from sounding the alarm to attack the invading organ.

According to the United Network for Organ Sharing, which tracks organ transplant data, almost 4,000 Americans died in 1996 as they waited for a compatible organ donor. Many thousands more have decreased quality of life while they wait for an organ match or suffer from anti-rejection drug side effects.

Harlan and Kirk believe that in addition to preventing organ transplant rejection, their research may provide help for immune system illnesses ranging from the relatively innocuous but annoying hay fever to severe and potentially life threatening illnesses such as multiple sclerosis and lupus.

Harlan and Kirk work at the Naval Medical Research Institute (NMRI) in Bethesda, Md.

Others collaborating on this project include Dr. Tom Davis and other researchers at NMRI, transplant surgeon Dr. Stuart Knechtle and his colleagues at the University of Wisconsin - Madison, and scientists from the Navy's civilian

partner organizations. Funding for much of this research came from the Office of Naval Research.

By Jan Davis, Bureau of Medicine and Surgery

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MN970299. Fleet Hospital Five Comes Home

Bremerton, WA - Fleet Hospital Five (FH 5) of Naval Hospital (NH) Bremerton is coming home.

Six-months ago members of FH 5 arrived at the Port-au-Prince International Airport in Haiti wide-eyed and a little nervous in anticipation of the unknown. Today, these same individuals, looking a little thinner and a lot happier, welcomed their Air Force replacements and began preparations to fly home.

A 20-person advanced party from the 355th Air Transportable Hospital, from Davis Monthan Air Force Base near Tucson, AZ arrived the last week in July to begin the turnover of the field hospital. Smiles, grins and a touch of euphoria spread quickly through Camp Kinser, the base of operation in Haiti, as the 54-members of FH 5 looked ahead to their upcoming family reunions.

"Six-months has been a long time," said HM2 Sheri Beymer of FH 5, "long, but rewarding. I've missed my family and I can't wait to come home to a bubble bath and a glass of wine."

During their six months, FH 5 has left a long list of accomplishments in support of the mission of the United States Support Group Mission in Haiti. As of July 29, the hospital had seen and treated more than 22,932 patients and administered more than 18,718 vaccinations to 5,610 Haitians.

"I think we made a major impact with everyone we saw," said HMC Lonnie Ely. "The local Haitian community and government have been very appreciative and supportive of our efforts. I'll always be proud of everything we accomplished here."

As the Navy winds down from its six-month mission, the Air Force medical people are gearing up for their six-months in Haiti.

"Everyone here is gung-ho and ready for action," said Air Force TSGT Cheryl Smith from the 355th. "We have to be, because we have some big shoes to fill after the great job the Navy has done."

By JOSN Jose Blanco, NH Bremerton

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MN970300. Medical Enlisted Commissioning Program Changed

Washington, DC - The Bureau of Naval Personnel (BUPERS) has announced changes to the Medical Enlisted Commissioning Program (MECP) selection process and the board convening date for FY98.

The FY98 board will convene on Dec. 8, 1997, instead of in the spring as in previous years. Applications are due to BUPERS (PERS-251) by Oct. 1, 1997. Additionally, age

waivers will now be accepted for otherwise qualified applicants who cannot graduate from the program prior to their 35th birthday, but can complete all requirements and be commissioned prior to their 40th birthday. Age waiver requests must be submitted with the application.

Applicants no longer need a letter of acceptance to a nursing school to apply for MECF, however, applicants must have applied to a qualified school of nursing. MECF applications must include an approved plan of study that demonstrates the applicants ability to complete the program in 36 months or less. Students selected for MECF must submit their letters of acceptance to the university and its school of nursing to the Naval School of Health Sciences (NSHS), CODE-OE no later than May 1, 1998.

For more information about this change, refer to NAVADMIN 187/97, BUPERS Homepage at www.navy.mil/homepages/bupers or contact CDR Jeffrey Bashford, NC, at (703) 693-2324, DSN 223-2324.

By LT Bill Anderson, BUPERS

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MN970301. San Diego "Friendly" to Nursing Moms

San Diego - For its outstanding initiative to help working moms, Naval Medical Center (NMC) San Diego was awarded the San Diego County Breastfeeding Coalition's second annual Breastfeeding Friendly Workplace award.

Several months ago, NMC San Diego transformed a storage room into a nursing mother's room, a relaxing haven from the hectic work environment for new mothers to express breast milk in privacy and comfort. It provides the additional advantage of providing a place where nursing mothers can share information and get emotional support from other mothers. The room is equipped with a refrigerator, freezer, breast pumps, comfortable easy chairs, and cheerful decor.

More than 150 staff members have used the nursing mothers' room since it opened. It has also inspired health care professionals to learn about breastfeeding and its benefit, and was the subject of a poster presentation at an international nurses' symposium.

Another spin off of the room is a "warmline" telephone line to certified lactation specialists to get information about breastfeeding at home or at the command.

Research has shown that breastfeeding-friendly workplaces have 57 percent less employee absenteeism since breast-fed babies have fewer illnesses. Research also shows companies that support breastfeeding have increased employee productivity, loyalty and morale.

NMC San Diego's next "mother friendly" goal is to get approved as a WHO/UNICEF-certified Breastfeeding Friendly Hospital.

By Dolores Atkins, NMC San Diego

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MN970302. Congress Approves Medicare Test for Military

Retirees

The Department of Defense announced that Congress has approved a limited demonstration of Medicare subvention as part of the current budget reconciliation legislation.

Today's Congressional approval of a Medicare subvention demonstration project will allow DOD to show how it can improve access to military health care for Medicare-eligible beneficiaries over 65 on a test basis.

"Improving access to military health care for Medicare-eligible military beneficiaries is important to the administration, and a congressionally-authorized Medicare subvention demonstration project is an important step toward achieving that goal for our beneficiaries," said Secretary of Defense William Cohen.

Today, most Medicare-eligible military retirees over 65 may not enroll in TRICARE. Under the Department's new managed health care delivery system they can only receive care on a space-available basis. Also, access to all of the care they may need may not be available when they need it.

With Medicare Subvention, these patients may enroll in TRICARE and be assured of the right care at the right time.

"We are delighted with the outcome of this Congressional action since it provides us the ability to enroll and care for more of our Medicare-eligible beneficiaries in TRICARE," said Dr. Edward D. Martin, acting assistant secretary of defense for health affairs.

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MN97303. Navy Medicine: Get the Whole Picture

Washington, DC - Ever wonder how your job relates to the rest of Navy Medicine? Now you can easily find out because the Navy Medicine annual plan is on the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery (BUMED) Homepage!

The annual plan describes performance objectives that support the Navy's Surgeon General's four initiatives of taking health care to the deckplates, moving information not people, re-engineering business practices, and making TRICARE work. It is a planning and performance measurement model for all levels of Navy medicine.

The annual plan sets targets within each of the strategic plan's goals: readiness, people, technology, stewardship, and health benefit. It defines the performance indicator goal and describes the measurement, computation, objective, and assessment.

The annual plan is accessible from the BUMED Homepage at support1.med.navy.mil/bumed. Adobe Acrobat, which can be downloaded from the Homepage, is needed to read the plan. Double click on "1997 Navy Medicine Annual Plan." This opens the MED-08 Homepage; double click again on "1997 Performance Plan."

The plan is a handy reference tool. You can measure your work performance and see how all that you do fits into the world of Navy medicine!

By Vera Ando-Winstead, BUMED

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MN970304. Portsmouth Plays Anti-Tobacco Role

Portsmouth, VA - Keep kids off tobacco.

That was the message staff members from Naval Medical Center (NMC) Portsmouth took to local tobacco merchants as part of the Third Annual Tobacco Free Youth Project.

The primary goal of the project was to inform local tobacco merchants of the short and long term dangers of tobacco use by youngsters. The volunteers showed the merchants how they can be part of the solution to keep kids from buying tobacco. They also checked on whether the merchants were complying with Virginia law prohibiting the sale of tobacco to minors.

All volunteers received training from the Virginia Department of Health's Office of Family Health Services, and were paired with local teenagers who were also volunteering.

Not only did the program contribute to a significant reduction in tobacco sales to minors, but it gave the participating kids some positive adult role models. The Portsmouth volunteers plan to make their participation an annual activity.

By Ron Pritchard, NMC Portsmouth

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MN970305. Groton Heads Off Mosquito Attack

Groton, CT - The summer solstice hails the arrival of summer, but in southeastern Connecticut, it also means the beginning of the mosquito season. And to some, that means danger.

More than 44 species of mosquitoes native to the region may carry the Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE) virus. This virus, if transmitted, can cause flu-like symptoms, a stiff neck or nausea. It also can prove deadly to humans infected with the virus if it goes untreated.

Last year the state had to declare a state of emergency because of their limited resources to handle the mosquito threat. In the interest of community spirit, Naval Hospital (NH) Groton's preventive medicine department pitched in by implementing a mosquito surveillance program, setting mosquito traps to gather insects for testing. Fortunately, no infected mosquitoes were discovered, and eventually cooler weather eliminated the threat.

But just as the warm weather has returned, so has the threat. Once again NH Groton's preventive medicine department has pitched in. The hospital, along with Groton's Ledge Light Health District, set up mosquito monitoring stations, and "suspect" pests were sent to a lab for testing of the EEE virus. To date, none have carried the virus.

LT Dave Florin, MSC, the hospital's preventive medicine officer and Groton's Ledge Light Health District representatives have appeared on public access television to keep residents informed about their "skeeters."

By LCDR Rick Bradley, NH Groton
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MN970306. TRICARE Question and Answer

Question: My family participates in TRICARE Extra since we live fairly far away from a military treatment facility. Recently my wife started going to a doctor she feels very comfortable with. Unfortunately, he doesn't participate in TRICARE Extra. Can we still go to him?

Answer: Yes. One of the advantages of participating in TRICARE Extra is you can also participate in TRICARE Standard, which allows you to use almost any health care provider you chose. You may also switch between the two at any time.

TRICARE Prime, however, requires you to see your Primary Care Manager (PCM) first for any care. To see another health care provider, you must first get a referral from your PCM. Otherwise, you may be required to pay up to 50 percent of the cost for your "unreferred" visit to a doctor!

Additional information on TRICARE is available on the World-Wide Web at www.ha.osd.mil.

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MN970307. Healthwatch: Fast Fitness for Right Now

No time to exercise? Try these toners anytime, anywhere.

1. Finger flexer. Twist a rubber band around all five fingers of one hand. Gently spread your fingers wide apart against the rubber band's resistance. Relax and repeat.

2. Hamstring Curls. Stand straight, holding something stable for support, such as the back of a chair. Lift one foot behind you as high as possible by bending your knee. Hold, then lower the foot to the floor. Repeat with the other foot.

3. Leg lifts. Sit in a chair with feet flat on the floor. Without moving your thigh, raise one foot by straightening you knee. Hold, then bring the foot back down. Repeat with the other foot.

4. Back Stretch. Sit erect with feet apart. Place fingertips on shoulders with your elbows spread wide apart. Slowly bend over and twist so that you move one elbow across and down to the opposite knee. Straighten up and gently bring both elbows back. Repeat to the other side.

5. Wise walking. Building to building or office to office, take longer, quicker strides, swing your arms as you go and use stairs whenever possible. You'll boost the intensity of the "aerobic" exercise and burn more calories. Plus, you'll get where you're going sooner.

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Feedback and comments are welcome. Story submissions are encouraged. Contact Jan Davis, MEDNEWS editor, at e-mail mednews@bms200.med.navy.mil, telephone 202/762-3223 (DSN 762-3223), or fax 202/762-3224.